DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 370 95 EA 010 768

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TITLE A Preparadigmatic Field: A Review of Research on School Vandalism.
INSTITUTION National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Hackensack, N.J. NewGate Resource Center.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.; Illinois Law Enforcement Commission, Springfield.; National Inst. for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Dept. of Justice/LEAA), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Feb 78
GRANT 75NI-99-0013; 76JN-99-0004
NOTE 21p.; Chapter 40 of "Theoretical Perspectives on School Crime, Volume I"; For other papers in this volume, see EA 010 729-767

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Theories; *Delinquency Prevention; *Delinquent Behavior; Elementary Secondary Education; Literature Reviews; *Research Methodology; *School Vandalism; Student Alienation; Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

One of 52 theoretical papers on school crime and its relation to poverty, this chapter reviews the various approaches used in the study of school vandalism and attempts to define what is needed now. The main contribution of early research on vandalism is to point out an intellectual dead end. Conventional demographic approaches to the problem, by themselves, lead nowhere. In the years since 1970, five distinct research issues have been identified. The first is the absence of satisfactory reporting and measuring techniques to provide baseline data. The second is the development of causal models that include situational factors and motivational constructs. The third is the problematic relationship between school vandalism and larger forces. The fourth is an outcome of the third: the defensive stance taken by many schools in response to research focused on vandalism as their problem. The fifth is the absence of any theoretical bases for grounded cost-benefit studies of security programs. (Author/MLF)

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ED158370

A paper from
"Theoretical Perspectives on School Crime"

Submitted to
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
February 1978

Submitted by
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY
Hackensack, N.J.

A PREPARADIGMATIC FIELD: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SCHOOL VANDALISM* ‡

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*The research reported herein was supported by Grants A-70-52R, 2-09-25-0410-02, 2-09-25-0410-3, 2-09-1138-04, from the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission and by Grants 75NI-99-0013 and 76JN-99-0004 from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Acknowledgment is made of the support of the following individuals: Project Co-Director: Gary Schwartz, Ph. D.; Project Co-Director (Administration): Joseph E. Puntil; Director, Department of Mental Health: Leroy P. Levitt, M. D.; Director, Illinois Mental Health Institutes: Jack Weinberg, M.D.; Director, Institute for Juvenile research: Frank T. Rafferty, M. D.; and Director of Research, Institute for Juvenile Research: Anne M. Seiden, M. D.

EA 010 768

‡This paper has appeared in the Review of Educational Research.

Introduction

The nature of research about school vandalism has changed in the past several years. Older research (1958-1969) follows normal science models for juvenile delinquency studies. Recent research (1970-present) is mostly administration oriented, and features the tentative development of new theoretical approaches. The early research (Clinard & Wade, 1958; Bates, 1962; Bates & McJunkins, 1962) produced a description of the youthful vandal as a working-class, minority male with possible personality disorders. His destructive behaviors was frequently attributed to his family life, rather than characterized as an ourgrowth of dissatisfaction or frustration with school. Not until the 1970s did vandalism become of great concern, causing changes in the style of research. The need was for more practically oriented research to provide educators with workable recommendations for reforms that could be implemented in school programs. These two distinct trends in research are clearly seen in the literature search.

The literature was initially surveyed by a review of the abstracts received from two ERIC searches using the headings "school vandalism" and "school vandalism and students' attitudes toward authority." Bibliographies were also obtained from a recently completed dissertation, from government research projects concerned with delinquency, and from the Stanford Research Institute's final report which

contained 255 references. Material was obtained from these sources until it began to overlap. This paper will review the various approaches used in the study of school vandalism, and will attempt to define what is needed now.

Incidence and Costs

Government agencies and school districts have worked together conducting investigations to obtain estimates of the incidence and costs of vandalism in schools. The most voluminous of these investigations is Bayh's (1975) report to Congress, which estimated the annual cost of vandalism at 500 million dollars. The U. S. Office of Education, however, estimates that damage to school property approaches 100 million dollars annually. In estimating the severity of this problem, research has not yet even solved the problems of definitions of vandalism and of accounting techniques.

> In our review of the literature, and work with heavily vandalized schools and school systems, it has been evident that there is little general agreement on the meaning of terms much less on the effectiveness of specified measures. (The Council of the Great City Schools, 1976)

Formerly, vandalism was viewed as a local problem and individual school districts defined their own problems and found their own solutions. But vandalism has now been recognized as a national problem, and discrepancies in figures result from lack of agreement on definitions of vandalism and accounting measures. This problem makes finding solutions more difficult. Three additional issues currently receiving

research attention are: (1) identification of the perpetrators of this behavior; (2) causes of school vandalism; and (3) development of response programs that enable schools to reduce vandalism.

Identification of Student Vandals

Clinard and Wade's (1958) typological approach to juvenile delinquency depends almost entirely on demographic characteristics as independent variables. Their statistics show a greater number of boys than girls involved in vandalism, their ages ranging from preadolescence to adolescence, with a tendency to outgrow this behavior in late adolescence. They found that the empirical evidence concerning social class is contradictory, which leads them to speculate that vandalism serves a similar function for working-class and middle-class boys, but is instigated for different reasons. Clinard and Wade report studies on the group nature of vandalism, which often starts as random group play and through continuation becomes deliberate. This study represents an attempt to use standard, but unrefined, techniques to attack the problem. Bates's (1962) study similarly relies on demographic characteristics as measures. These studies reflect the position of sociologists in the 1960s. But vandalism is more complex than that. More theoretical refinement is necessary if we are to find solutions.

Richards's (1976) recent research on vandalism explores sex and grade trends, relationships between attitudes and

self-reported vandalism, interactions in family life related to vandalism, and school experiences related to vandalism. Her study contained self-report data from 3,000 middle-class children from the fifth through the twelfth grades. Self-reports of damaging and defacing property peaked about the seventh grade and declined steadily through high school. Her data on sex differences contradict the usual assumption that vandalism is more frequent among boys than girls. Girls reported more vandalism than was expected, and in some instances (e.g., school defacement) their rates exceeded those of boys.

In tracing relationships between attitudes and self-reported vandalism Richards found the strongest links to be those dealing with students' expressions of anger toward parents or school officials. The target of anger appeared to be important. Items related to daily interactions with authority figures showed associations with vandalism. This suggests that students' dependent situation and lack of autonomy may be related to experiences and attitudes (e.g., feeling ignored) which show some relationship to vandalism. Measures of psychological maladjustment show the weakest links with self-reported vandalism.

Richards suggests that it is students' responses to school experiences, rather than any specific school experience per se, which have the greater effect on the child's decision to vandalize. Again, her data indicate that the relationship between specific situations and self-reported vandalism is

such that property destruction is more targeted than is generally assumed.

An assumption of sociological research in the 1950s and 1960s--that working-class, maladjusted boys commit most acts of vandalism--is not substantiated by current research (Goldmeier, 1974; Bayh, 1975; Richards, 1976; McGuire, 1976). Thus, in an analysis of causes and incidence, we move from issues of social class, gender, and personality characteristics toward a broader explanation that takes into account the influence of situations of provocation and performance of vandalism and the youth culture in which they occur. The attempt to develop more sophisticated causal models is a recent phenomenon.

Causes of School Vandalism

As researchers continue their efforts to explain causes of school vandalism, Cohen's (1971) and Ward's (1973) distinction between conventional and ideological vandalism helps bring to the surface the perception of vandalism as a form of violence that must be considered apart from other acts of violence (e.g., homicide, burglary, rape). Ward presents an analysis of types of vandalism with a greater focus on meanings, motives, and patterns. In addition to his delineation of conventional forms of vandalism (acquisitive, tactical, vindictive, play, malicious), and distinctions between rationales for conventional and for ideologically inspired

vandalism, he recognizes the convergence in adult perceptions and responses to each because "the overt behavioral characteristics of ideological vandalism is identical with that of conventional vandalism" (Ward, 1973).

Cohen recognizes these convergences between conventional and ideologically inspired vandalism, but he questions the effect society's interpretation of vandalism has on the behavior itself. He suggests that society's dramatization of the extent and costs of vandalism should tell us something about the community that places a "high degree of problem awareness" on such behavior.

Cohen and Ward's studies mark the transition between traditional demographic approaches and current situational approaches. The former represent valuable theoretical efforts reflecting the position of sociologists in the 1960s and early 1970s, while the latter confront issues of social reform, social relationships, and the environment.

Some examples of situational factors are school architecture, adult and community responses, family relationships, and perceptions of school experiences (Ward, 1973; Zeizel, 1974; Zimbardo, 1969). According to Zimbardo, symbols of social order are the targets of vandalism. Students are expressing their dissatisfaction and frustration with their lives at home and at school and/or with their role in the community. Identification of the origin of this dissatisfaction has been the subject of speculation and empirical testing.

Richards, examining variables such as school performance, parent's expectations of child's performance, family rule structure, and peer processes, found some modest relationships between those variables and vandalism, but not enough to provide a basis from which to theorize.

Hence, it does not appear to be objective aspects of the adolescent's life that cause them to vandalize, but the combination of feelings and experiences in daily life that produce a sense of alienation from the adult world. The adolescent's role in society is not well defined (Ducey, 1978); he or she constantly encounters a world that doesn't trust his or her judgment as a youth. The difficulties and non-acceptance he or she meets in school and in the community result in feelings of alienation. What the measurable conditions are that create a sense of alienation has not been explored beyond speculation, but this is the point we have been led to in synthesizing previous research.

Clearly, this body of research is moving toward causal models to define the problem of vandalism. Much of this has been done in the area of juvenile delinquency, but it has not been systematically applied to school vandalism.

The importance of the physical environment as a determinant of behavior has been noted by Ward (1973), Zeizel (1974), Zimbardo (1969), and others. However, this concept has been applied primarily in responding to vandalism and will be dealt with in the following section.

Local Response Programs

Education journals are replete with articles on how to deal with vandalism in schools. For the most part these articles report the initiatives taken by a particular school or district to reduce vandalism. Most of these programs tighten security through the use of alarm systems, closed circuit television, increased lighting, and plainclothes police. Success is measured in dollars saved (Dukiet, 1973; Miller & Beer, 1974). Other approaches reported to reduce vandalism are behavior modification techniques (Haney, 1973) and increasing community involvement in schools.

However, several issues arise when we attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these local programs. First, the "Hawthorne effect": what is the effect of focusing the students' and community's attention on the problem?

> There may have been a cyclical dropoff having nothing whatever to do with the experiment itself. Perhaps the "Hawthorne Effect" may be an explanation, that is, the mere fact that some attention was being drawn to the schools' vandalism problems may have been sufficient to effect the glass breakage reduction. (Greenberg, 1974)

Another explanation which has not previously been considered is the "sleeper effect." Immediately perceived "success" at the behavioral level may disappear without further intervention. This would be because the stimulus (security measures) do not address root causes. A Year One vs. Year Two definition of success may be invalid.

We must also question what is meant by a "successful" program to reduce school vandalism. The literature reports that, at great expense, schools have created security systems to prevent window smashing, equipment theft, and defacement of property. Destructive behavior decreases, but the difference can be minimal (Greenberg, 1974). Is it worth the effort and money to install such devices, and what effect does this have on other behavior? What is happening with the experiences that instigate vandalism? If vandalism is caused by motivations such as anger and frustration, is it necessary for students to find other outlets to express themselves?

Although the education literature is filled with reports on "successful" programs, Greenberg cites one instance of a costly failure. And current reports reveal that there are other instances similar to this. The reason is that the schools rely on the use of power, rather than on restructuring social relationships. The use of power should be a last resort in the resolution of social conflict. The security measures used in schools represent such power. The vandalism problem is complex, and it has not been solved by government hearings, mail surveys to ascertain the extent of the problem, and literature reviews describing how school vandalism has been decreased at great expense. Studies have not yet produced less repressive and less costly solutions.

A review of the measures of success in local response programs shows the lack of well-grounded criteria for

evaluating these programs. The lack of theoretically grounded measures makes problem solving difficult. Increased interest in "prevention" may indicate that it is time to balance the current behavioral control outlook with an approach dealing with motivational aspects of the problem. More efficient, theoretically oriented evaluation techniques should present educators with information on the sources of vandalism.

A problem inherent in many of the prevention programs is that strategies to reduce vandalism are planned before the problem has been carefully diagnosed. The desire to stop vandalism, at any expense, has preceded consideration of the motives and meanings of the behavior. We must question whether just changing the behavior is what we want. If we are interested in so-called primary prevention (Ward, 1973), then the examination of motivators is as important as solving the overt behavioral problem itself.

Zimbardo (1969) has impressively shown the important relation of the physical environment to the behavior of individuals in the community. He suggests that modification of the physical environment to make it more harmonious with social needs is more effective than social coercion. In suggesting that social behavior is influenced by the physical environment where it occurs, we are relocating the notion of pathology from the individual to his environment (Ward, 1973).

Ward (1973) and Zeizel (1974) have utilized this theory of "architectural determinism" in their prevention programs to reduce crime. Two alternatives are presented. The first is to design the school to be more aesthetically pleasing and thereby to instill pride and care in its students. The second is to create structurally a crime proof fortress--no windows, special paint to prevent defacement, etc.

The idea of restructuring the physical environment to lessen vandalism is legitimate for environments that readily invite vandalism. A fence surrounding a school is one example. Here, obviously, the school is for use by children; but the presence of the fence to protect the school from these same children creates a paradox that produces a sense of anger and/or alienation. The fence is an encouragement, a challenge. In this sense, the fence, if not the school, becomes a more likely target for vandals.

The recent orientation of research dealing with situational factors moves away from reliance on power as a means of social control and heads toward restructuring the social and physical environments. The apparently random failure of tight security systems has begun to lead researchers toward a wider view of the problem of vandalism.

National Response Programs

Government agencies have been sponsoring major research efforts to help design programs to reduce school violence. Research for Better Schools (RBS) (1976) was requested by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to design a program which would establish a working relationship between LEAA and the educational community and which would provide information for LEAA to use in helping schools reduce crime. The specific tasks of RBS were: (1) to examine the nature and extent of school violence; (2) to find what efforts are being made to reduce school violence; (3) to determine what schools need in order to reduce crime; and (4) to find out how other federally funded programs are helping schools.

With respect to this fourth task however, RBS found that evaluations of school programs are few. This was due, in part, to the constantly changing techniques and goals of the programs. In addition, using available data from an earlier study in which school superintendents were asked what LEAA could do to improve delinquency prevention, they note that only 42 percent of the school districts responded to the questionnaire. They also stated that teachers claim that school administrators are not facing up to the problem of school crime. This has been an issue in contract negotiations.

RBS suggests, however, that the burden of problem definition be assigned to each school requesting assistance.

This recommendation is problematic in the light of such lack of participation on the part of school administrators. Though regional and national LEAA staffs will be available to support local efforts, there is no systematic approach to evaluating an individual school's crime problem, and little coordination between the diagnosis of the problem and the organization of the responses. To achieve the changes desired, crime prevention programs must satisfy the problems found in the particular school. A wider range of alternatives, both in the area of problem definition and that of problem solving must be presented to administrators, teachers, and agencies concerned with crime prevention.

RBS developed a technical assistance strategy with the following features: (1) provision of small grants to individual schools or districts to stimulate adoption of programs; (2) establishment of regional staffs to offer technical assistance; and (3) development of national programs to support local efforts.

The strategy designed by RBS appears to provide lines of communication between government personnel and school officials and thus to establish a relationship between the two. However, specific objectives and evaluation criteria are still lacking, and this can cripple their efforts.

The Safe Schools Study, currently being conducted by the National Institute of Education at the request of Congress, is designed to provide two major types of information:

(1) description of the nature and extent of crime in schools and current attempts at prevention; and (2) explanation of the variation in crime between schools and an indication of the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies used in these schools. This study uses established theories derived from research in sociology, psychology, and criminology. It is the first major attempt to apply delinquency theory to policy issues on vandalism and is still in progress; completion is expected in 1978.

The overall conception of this project and the detailed description of objectives indicate a positive movement of research in this area. School vandalism cannot be isolated from other problems in the educational community. It must be studied in a climate of openness, with a realistic view of the environment in which it occurs.

The final report of the Stanford Research Institute study (1975) documents the methodological approach for evaluation of the problem of vandalism. Special data-collection forms were sent to schools to achieve a unified reporting scheme to aid in the analysis of information concerned with cost and frequency of vandalism, methods used to combat vandalism, characteristics of the known vandal, and questioning of representatives of schools. However, this was the most difficult and time-consuming task of the study and was "far beyond the resources that were available to this project" (Stanford, 1975).

Interviews with members of the school community showed that there are differing opinions about the motivational factors involved in vandalism and that the level of concern about vandalism as a problem is dependent on the individual affected. For instance, students perceive locker vandalism as a greater problem than do school administrators, while the administrators are more concerned about graffiti.

The project of the Stanford Research Institute has shown that vandalism must be viewed as a multifaceted problem, no aspect of which can be ignored. Whether research focuses on motivational aspects of the problem of on the overt behavioral characteristics, shortcuts taken simply to stop the immediate manifestations are not necessarily long-term preventive measures.

Concluding Remarks

The main contribution of early research on vandalism is to point out an intellectual dead end. Conventional demographic approaches to the problem, by themselves, lead nowhere. In the years since 1970, five distinct research issues have been idenitfied. The first is the absence of satisfactory reporting and measuring techniques to provide baseline data. The second is the development of causal models which include situational factors and motivational constructs. The third is the problematic relationship between school vandalism and larger social forces. The fourth is an outcome of the third: the defensive stance taken by many schools in response to

research focused on vandalism as <u>their</u> problem. The fifth is the absence of any theoretical basis for grounded cost-benefit studies of security programs.

Clearly the phenomenon of school vandalism has not been dealt with adequately by the social science community. In this respect, researchers are in the same state as administrators. The Safe Schools Study of the National Institute for Education is the most important of the many current research efforts. But in terms of analysis, this is a preparadigmatic field, and we can expect still more failure before we emerge with a successful diagnosis.

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